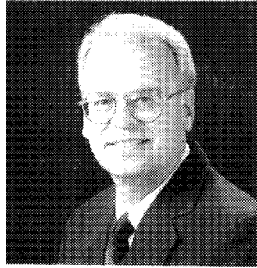


**Matchmaker, Matchmaker:  
Keys to Compatibility**

**Thomas Holman, Ph.D.**

Tom is Professor of Family Science at Brigham Young University; widely recognized for his research and education on marriage.



In a January 1994 article in the journal Family Relations,

Dr. Holman, with collaborators

Jeffrey Larson and Stacy Harmer describe the rationale for developing PREP-M (Preparation for Marriage Questionnaire) to assess, in classroom or premarital counseling settings:

- 1) relationships among couples prior to marriage;
- 2) casual, serious, and engaged partners;
- 3) a comprehensive range of factors related to marital satisfaction; and to provide to educators and counselors:
- 4) easily interpretable reports of results to use with couples;
- 5) economical, and easy to administer; and to continue improvement by insuring the instrument was:
- 6) psychometrically reliable and valid;
- 7) theoretically and empirically grounded;
- 8) applied to an expanding variety of groups and research questions for which it could provide useful answers.

Holman, Larson, and Harmer's study of 206 individuals is the latest in a 15-year process of creating a research-based scale to predict marital success and aid in marriage preparation training.

The 178 scale items tap five major areas of readiness:

Couple Unity in Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs: importance of money, religion, morality, privacy; Attitudes toward premarital sex, wife/mother employment, family planning/contraception, marital role expectations.

Personal Readiness: emotional health, emotional maturity, empathic communication behavior, self-disclosure, self-esteem, drug abstinence, independence from family-of-origin, overall readiness for marriage, age, religious activity (Partner Readiness is assessed on the same factors).

Couple Readiness: couple agreement, relationship stability, approval of significant others, realistic expectations, and items on marital fidelity, courtship abuse, months engaged, compatibility with in-laws, similar mental abilities, savings or debts, relationship satisfaction, and premarital pregnancy.

Background and Home Environment: satisfaction with home environment, quality of home environment, quality of parent-child relationship, frequencies of significant stressor events, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

Results of their study found:

- 1) Higher PREP-M scores associated with higher subsequent marital satisfaction and stability scores, one year into marriage;
- 2) Husbands' premarital scores more highly correlated with later satisfaction ( $r = .44$ ) and stability ( $r = .34$ ) than wives scores ( $r = .25, .20$ ).
- 3) scores were as likely to predict partner marital criterion variables as their own;
- 4) PREP-M scores were more highly related to marital satisfaction than marital stability;
- 5) Overall, PREP-M scores distinguished between those individuals whose marriages were most satisfying and stable and those individuals whose marriages were least satisfying.

The authors suggest that PREP-M may be useful for classroom (learning about marriage and training of marriage educators) as well as in premarital counseling evaluation and intervention.

In addition, Dr. Holman has provided the following information on implementing PREP-M at our request:

- individuals and couples at all levels of dating find the print-outs (and additional available data) meaningful and highly interesting ways of learning about themselves.
- providers report the couples' data print-out and videotape on its use in counseling to be a valuable addition to their practice.
- cost is \$4 per person (\$8 per couple) for persons provide (confidential) data and forwarding address, cooperating in the BYU Center for Studies of the Family research project. Non-participants pay \$6.
- PREP-M can be completed in 30 minutes and scoring can be completed and returned in 10-14 days.
- providers or scholars can access data for research purposes for cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.
- providers can add up to 15 of their own questionnaire items to gather additional information for study or programming.

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**When a match of equal partners/then I fear not.**

--Aeschylus  
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## **Nurturing the Grass Roots: B.C.'s Marriage Preparation Initiative**

### **Roseanne Farnden Lyster**

*Roseanne is employed by the British Columbia Council for the Family and Editor of the Marriage Education News.*

The work of the B.C. Council for the Family in marriage preparation dates back to our inception in the mid-1970s. From Day One, we have been concerned with ensuring that couples in the province of British Columbia have access to competent marriage preparation services.

In the early 1980s, a marriage preparation manual was developed, and a team of trainers travelled around the province offering training in marriage preparation to potential facilitators. Much of this work was in cooperation with churches and community colleges. In 1986, a consultation on marriage preparation was held, with a show-case of various models of delivery. Coming out of this consultation was the concept of establishing a marriage preparation office for the province, coordinating training, resource materials development, referral, and promotion of quality marriage preparation opportunities--both religious and secular. Many of these functions have been carried out.

In 1988, a second consultation was held, resulting in publishing of "Marriage Preparation: A Resource Book for Instruction" and a three-year, provincially-funded Marriage Preparation Initiative (MPI) to further the field.

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### **Marriage Preparation Resource Book**

#### **Introduction for Providers:**

Encouraging Participation  
Getting to Know Participants  
Teaching Situations  
Approaches to Teaching  
Specific Teaching Techniques  
Evaluation  
What to do Before You Start

#### **Topic Areas:**

Expectations and Reality  
Identity and Values  
Communication--Talking and Listening  
Communication--Intimacy  
Creative Conflict  
Sexuality  
Lifestyle  
Future Growth  
Appendix: Birth Control

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The MPI had four major streams: promotion of marriage preparation, training and support of marriage preparation providers, development of resource materials, and research.

Some funding for MPI continued after the three-year pilot, extending many of its functions into the present.

In the area of promotion, various strategies have been employed. These include publishing brochures on the benefits of marriage preparation, development and distribution of a ten-minute video, establishing contacts with the media, appearing on radio and TV talk shows, producing a directory of providers, participating in wedding fairs, and working with the schools.

Training and support of providers included regional gatherings and seminars from a community development perspective, provincial conferences, a lending library, publishing Marriage Education News (quarterly networking newsletter) and PROVIDER (quarterly subscription-based training and update tool, 1991-94).

In our regional meetings, providers indicated the following materials would be helpful to them: supplements to the Resource Book on family violence prevention, later life marriages, cross-cultural marriage, and remarriage. Six brochures were developed on sexuality, planning, communication, conflict resolution, family-of-origin, and intimacy. A 28-minute video with discussion guide was developed on communicating about sexual dynamics. A guide book for high school teachers on marriage concepts was prepared; also a book of marriage enrichment exercises.

In research, we completed a training needs survey of practitioners as well as a survey of marriage preparation activities. Two public surveys gathered information on what people know about marriage preparation. Major studies have examined consumer satisfaction with programs, impact of programs on transition to marriage, and differences in transition among those who did and did not cohabit.

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### **Consumer Views of Marriage Preparation**

Mary Russell & Roseanne Farnden-Lyster  
*Family Relations*, 1992, 41.

-Satisfaction with programs was high (4.3/5.0)  
-Most Valued Content: Family-of-Origin insights, finances, communication, roles, conflict resolution, parenting  
-Couples with more time before marriage benefitted more  
-Younger couples favored more "concrete" topics (money)  
-Older couples were more likely to recommend program

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Resources available through the B.C. Council for the Family (Suite 204, 2590 Granville St., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6H 3H1; 604-660-0675):

**Marriage Preparation: A Resource Book for Instruction.** Rob Lees. (1994). (\$20; supplements \$5)

**Enriching Your Marriage.** exercises on values & skills. (\$5).

**Marriage Education News** is a 4-page summary of new resources and ideas published quarterly (no cost).

**"And Finally..."****NOTES ON MARRIAGE AND PREPARATION****RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT**

Relationship Enhancement (RE), a humanistic communication and problem-solving skills model developed in the 1970s by family therapist Dr. Bernard Guerney at Penn State University, is one of the most thoroughly tested approaches to marriage preparation available. A recent investigation at the University of Arizona (Ridley & Sladzek, 1992, *Family Relations*, 41, 2, 148-153) found that teaching couples how to Express feelings, Empathize, Switch between expression and empathizing, and Facilitate partner expression resulted in increased desire for shared control (esp. for women), increased wanted and expressed affection in treatment (vs. control) couples, and increased desire for inclusion (commitment). The researchers **emphasized the importance of structured and sustained practice** for positive change.

**MINNESOTA COUPLES COMMUNICATION PROGRAM**

Minnesota Couples Communication Program (MCCP), developed in the 1970s at the University of Minnesota by communications specialist/therapist Dr. Sherrod Miller, combines awareness and communication skills improvement through a small group feedback process. Its structure is outlined in a 1983 article by the authors in *The Counseling Psychologist* (11, 3, 73-77):

**Immediate Objectives:** (1) tools for increased self/partner/interaction awareness; (2) increased communication skills; (3) increased confidence in handling developmental issues; **Long-Range Objectives:** (1) couple flexibility in dealing with change; (2) increased intimacy, satisfaction; (3) couple self-perception as active agents, gaining skills to adapt successfully. **Format:** 5-8 couples/ 1-2 instructors, 18 hrs (6 wk, retreat); **Techniques:** (1) Awareness Wheel; (2) Understanding Partner (active listening; acknowledging; inviting; checking out; summarizing); (3) Communication Styles; (4) Mapping (understanding, decision-making, realistic action/difficult issues); (5) Phases of Relationship Development; (6) Conflict Resolution (esp. handling anger, esteem); (7) Building Intimacy, based on skill emphasis, voluntarism, group learning context. **Overall Results:** Improved self- and other-awareness, enhanced empathy and expressive skills, reduced conflicts and increased effectiveness in problem-solving.

**OTHER POPULAR PROGRAMS:****CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT**

Developed in the 1970s by pastor and psychologist H. Norman Wright, CME is a widely used assessment and teaching package which combines insights from family systems theory with psychodynamic and developmental theories. Couples discuss issues including roles, finances, and sexuality with each other, a trained provider, and parents. Crisis events (abuse, addiction) as well as relationship expectations are incorporated in the 6-12 hour program. For more information, CME, 17821 17th St., Suite 290, Tustin, CA 92680 (714-544-7560).

**ENGAGED ENCOUNTER**

Engaged Encounter (EE) is an offshoot of Marriage Encounter seminars created in the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s. Through a series of ideas (on couple strengths/weaknesses, desires, ambitions, goals, attitudes toward money, sex, children, family, and their role in society and the Church), presented by a priest and married couple-leaders, couples are stimulated to dialogue privately. Communal meals and worship allow for fellowship with other couples. EE is Catholic in focus, but anyone interested may attend. Contact Catholic Family Services (1-800-788-4616) or Jim & Mary Kay Pieper (307-237-2905).

**BEFORE AND AFTER: SMALL GROUP MARRIAGE EDUCATION**

Dr. Edward Bader and colleagues at the University of Toronto conducted an intensive small group training and discussion, lecture/film, which featured **premarital** (on communication, family influences, finances, sexuality, law and ceremony) and **postmarital** (on conflict, roles, relationship enhancement). Program couples decreased in conflict and increased in positive affect, were more willing to seek help, and more capable in tests of problem-solving at 6 and 12 months. (*Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 1980, 6, 2, 171-179). Both the "reality-check" and continued support of sessions after marriage were affirmed by couples.

**THE PERFECT PARTNER...**

*If you want to marry me,  
here's what you'll have to do:  
You must learn how to make  
a perfect chicken-dumpling stew.  
And you must sew my holey socks,  
and soothe my troubled mind,  
And develop a knack  
for scratching my back,  
And keep my shoes spotlessly shined,  
And while I rest  
you must rake up the leaves,  
And when it is hailing and snowing  
You must shovel the walk...  
and be still when I talk,  
And--hey--where are you going?*

Shel Silverstein. (1977). *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. New York: Harper and Row.

**MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT**

***There is Life after the Wedding***

Ohio State University Cooperative Extension has produced the most comprehensive and up-to-date guide on what to do after the knot is tied. Designed for use in an educational setting with well-adjusted couples, "Choice, Not Chance" offers six sessions of leader and participant materials for couples at any point in growth together. Four principles underlie the program:

- \*Marriage is a dynamic process, not static.***
- \*Couples need new skills and sharpening old skills at each life stage.***
- \*The marriage relationship is central to any attempt to strengthen families.***
- \*Planning--selecting goals, making decisions, creating strategies is part of enhancing marriage and life.***

"Choice, Not Chance" points to six **keys to successful marriage:**

1. **Trust:** Mutual respect and acceptance of differences.
2. **Commitment:** Determination to "keep working at the relationship."
3. **Skills:** Continuous improvement in capacities to express and listen to feelings, needs, make decisions, and manage conflict.
4. **Caring:** Nurturing and supporting each other's growth and interests.
5. **Reciprocity:** Exchanging positive rewards in ways build the long-term esteem and loyalty of a partner.
6. **Effort:** Participating in formal and informal growth experiences on a regular basis.

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***Wanted: Wife, hard-working, with tractor. If interested, send picture of tractor.***  
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"Choice, Not Chance" goes on to summarize the challenges facing couples at each stage in marriage:

1. **Courtship:** Building and enriching effective communication.
2. **Honeymoon:** Mutual adjustments, realigned friend and family ties, day-to-day cooperation.
3. **Young Children:** Responsibilities with children, adjustments to spouse, friend, family, and work. Building communication skills and spending time with each other tend to enhance the relationship.
4. **Adolescents:** Balancing support and liberation of children, coping with career pressures and making time for each other are important.
5. **Launching Children:** "Letting go" and "taking stock" can lead to revitalizing relationships.
6. **Empty-Nest:** Renegotiating couple and individual activities energizes.
7. **Retirement:** Finding substitutes for career and enjoying newfound time alone and together are key.
8. **Old Age:** Building on strengths of earlier stages, supporting through health crises and losses are challenges typical of this stage.

"Choice, Not Chance" is full of activities as well as explanations. Here's one sample:

***Couple Activity #5:  
Writing a Love Letter***

Imagine you and your spouse have been separated for a month or more. Write a love letter to your spouse... Write about how you miss your spouse, how you enjoyed the last time you were together, or what you plan to do when you see each other again. Omit the news part like "johnny went to the dentist today." Then put it in an envelope addressed to your spouse, put a stamp on it, and mail it. Begin to express your feelings of love and tenderness for your spouse to him or her on a regular basis. It may be difficult at first, but will get easier and easier the more you do it.

**MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RESOURCES**

**Choice, Not Chance: Enhancing Your Marital Relationship.**

Katherine Beckman Mims  
 Family Life Specialist  
*CHNOCH (Bull. 832-A) \$1.30, 1992, 43 pp.*  
*CNCLG1 (Bull. 832-A) \$3.25, 1992, 21 pp. Leader/Intro*  
*CNCLG2 (Bull. 832-B) \$3.25, 1992, 31 pp. Leader/Extended*  
 Ohio State University Cooperative Extension, Publications Office, 385 Kottman Hall, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044 (614-292-1607)

**Keeping Your Marriage Strong**

13-issue series by Pat Nelson, Family & Child Development Specialist, Univ. of Delaware CES, Townsend Hall, Newark, DE 19717-1303 (302-831-2509)

**Why Marriages Succeed or Fail.**

John Gottman. (1993). New York, NY: Simon and Schuster. (\$21) A readable review of research and excellent summary of principles for positive communication, conflict resolution.

**Peer Marriage,** by Pepper Schwartz

discusses the issues and skills needed in equal-partner relationships of the '90s. Upper middle-class/educated couples will probably be most receptive. (New York: Free Press, \$20)

**Time for a Better Marriage,**

by Don Dinkmeyer and Jon Carlson (1984, American Guidance Service, Circle Pines, MN) is a widely-used, easily-grasped marriage enrichment program. (\$20)

**Talking and Listening Together**

(Miller, Wackman, Nunnally, & Miller, 1993). Couple communication version of the Connecting skills presented at May '94 SUMMIT. Self- and other-awareness, listening, speaking, and conflict resolution skills are presented in creative, user-friendly format. (Interpersonal Communications, 7201 S. Broadway, Littleton, CO 80122, 1-800-328-5099; \$16).

**BEN'S RESEARCH CORNER:*****Marriage Prep is the Wave of the Future***

What's an Extension Specialist doing in marriage preparation? O.K., Extension does parent education, family strengths, even youth-at-risk. Don't churches or somebody else handle that? The answer is "yes" (some churches do offer training or consultation), "not much" (most couples receive little or no preparation for life together), and "why not?" It occurred to me in graduate school that while many public and private agencies offered parent education and support or help for battered or divorcing spouses, little was being done to avoid these crises and get couples off to the right start.

My own research focused on consumer interests: what do young adults want in preparation programs? No one had asked before, and here's what we found out:

**Silliman & Schumm (1989) Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy:**

-Topics of greatest interest were parenting (surprise!), learning to listen, resolve conflicts, and forgive (start w/4-H life skills)

-Females were more interested, but priorities were about the same for genders; males had relatively more interest in money management and practical issues (good entry points).

**Silliman, Schumm, & Jurich ('92)Contemp. Family Therapy**

-Parents, premarital classes, experience, friends, and school were preferred sources of info (let's get them involved)

-Above average interest up to 12 hrs. training, with strong interest for 1-6 hrs. (would you allow 6 hrs. driver ed.?)

-A combination of providers preferred (clergy, counselors, teachers, doctors, older couples, etc.)

-No-cost/individual attention preferred (who'll pay for it???)

-Question/answer and "how to" skills seen as most important

**Silliman & Schumm (1993)Family Perspective**

-A theoretical model to predict interest in programs showed that both family/peer influences and personal interests were strong predictors of plans to attend a marriage prep program. Implication: Sensitize/publicize early (via school, clubs) and work through parents and peers to build skills

**Silliman & Schumm ('95)Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy**

-Young adults with highest interest tended to be females; familiar with programs; from upper-middle class, stable, and religious homes (O.K., so we need to broaden marketing!)

***Projects "in the works" include***

*Duncan, Box, & Silliman--replication of my dissertation with racially-diverse Auburn Univ. students, submitted for review*  
*Schumm & Silliman--a retrospective by married couples on the value of their marriage prep experiences, in review.*

*Silliman & Darling--a survey of consumer preferences for info sources and topics at Florida State Univ., Spring '95.*

*Silliman/literature reviews--a catalog of research projects and a critical review of themes and needs now in process*

*Silliman/AWARE--surveys of UW students & soon Natrona high school students with a new AWARE relationship attitudes & expectations and my revised consumer survey in process*

-A "first of its kind" study with program potential, responding to interest in Natrona, Converse, Goshen, and Lincoln County.

**RESOURCES IN REVIEW*****Books & Curricula***

***The First Year of Marriage*** Miriam Arond and Samuel Pauker's (1987) summary of research with 346 newlyweds on topics from adapting to marriage to extended family to conflict (personality, power, communication, roles and tasks, money, and work) to intimacy (sex, closeness, friendship) to lessons learned (troubles, celebrations, memories). While the sample is non-representative, experiences are pretty typical. (New York: Warner Books, \$12)

***Premarital Counseling*** by Robert Stahmann and William Hiebert, (Second Edition, 1987, Lexington Books, \$25) is the consummate practitioner's guide to understanding the challenges of marriage and helping couples. *The Dynamic Relationship History* (a time-line on family, friendship, and dating and future growth together) is the featured technique. PMC discusses assessment and program design as well as issues ranging from finances and sexuality to dating violence and remarriage.

***Assessments***

**Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (T-JTA)** is a 180-item (30-40 min.) used in academic and vocational as well as marriage prep settings to assess nine bi-polar personality traits: nervous vs. composed; depressive vs. light-hearted; active/social vs. quiet; expressive/responsive vs. inhibited; sympathetic vs. indifferent; subjective vs. objective; dominant vs. submissive; hostile vs. tolerant; self-disciplined vs. impulsive. Partners complete T-JTA for self, other. Training is required for administration and interpretation. Info can be obtained from Psychological Publications, Inc. 5300 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90027 1-800-345-8378.

**PreMarital Inventory PROFILE (PMI)** is a 140-item (30-45 min.) survey of understanding similarities and differences on interests, religion, expectations, family, finances, children, sexuality, communication, and personal growth and discussing these issues in an educational or counseling setting. Contact Intercommunications Pub., Inc., 52-A Dogwood Acres Dr., Chapel Hill, NC 27516; 1-800-999-0680.

**Myers-Briggs Indicator (MBTI)** contains 94 items (20-30 min.) which help counselors determine preferences on Extroversion-Introversion, Sensing-Intuition, Thinking-Feeling, and Judging-Perceiving styles. Types have some implications for understanding and interacting with partner, but differences in type are not necessarily predictive of divorce. Contact Assoc. for Psychological Type, 9140 Ward Parkway, Kansas City, MO 64114, (816) 444-3500.

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***The honeymoon is over when he phones that he'll be late for supper and she has already left a note that it's in the refrigerator.***--Bill Lawrence  
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### PARADOXES:

#### **"I, John, Take You, Mary..."**

It's a good thing couples don't ask questions about the wording of their marriage vows while standing at the altar. But maybe it might not be such a bad idea:

**"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the presence of God and these witnesses to witness the joining in marriage of John and Mary..."**

**"I, John, take you, Mary to be my wife; and I promise, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband..."**

(Him): "What do I take you for? Can I promise to be loving and faithful no matter how mad you make me? Marriage is an institution, like Mae West said, but I do not want to be committed to a straight-jacket. How about partnership, give-and-take? I can commit to that."

#### COMMITMENT PARADOXES

Dedication and forgiveness are critical to coping with a fallible partner, routine or non-romantic times together, but... Honest differences and accountability are important to make course corrections and infuse new life into old commitments. Too much forgiveness often tolerates abuse or disloyalty. Too much accountability can produce a spirit of criticism.

**"...in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health..."**

(Grandparents): "I wonder if they have any idea how tough that is? Oh, well, they're from good families and have so much in common. They'll get along O.K."

#### COMPATABILITY PARADOXES

Different personalities, interests and backgrounds do require more understanding, carry more risks of conflict, but... Differences can also complement and enrich a relationship, when partners know how to use them to grow together. Similarities generally result in higher satisfaction, but... Similarities can also be overestimated: assuming a few likenesses mean agreement on everything or no need to talk things out...whew, this is more complicated than it looks!

**"...as long as we both shall live."**

(Parents): "Wait a minute...like Grandma and Grandpa Jones? Fifty years? They've already had their differences. Can they get along that long? Huu..."

COMMUNICATION is key to long, happy marriage, but... Happy couples to "read" each other's "non-verbals" more accurately, often listening and talking "without a word... Yet long-married, satisfied couples also share feelings and ideas directly more often, and for a wider variety of needs.

#### **"I, Mary take you, John, to be my husband..."**

(Her): "Husband...what did that mean? Protector? Care-taker? No, what I need is a friend, to take me as I am."

#### COMPANIONSHIP PARADOXES

Individual identity and self-esteem are critical for each to contribute to relationship growth (it's 1 x 1, not 1/2 + 1/2); Mutual support and sacrifice is an indispensable ingredient of positive marital interaction; ...and the mix of "me" and "we" is always changing.

**"and I promise, before God and these witnesses..."**

(Her): "Yeah, I say, 'I'll do my part, but which of them is going to help us if we get into trouble? You're married, girl, you're an adult, they'll say, if I have to ask for help."

#### COMMUNITY PARADOXES

Independence from family-of-origin is a critical task for couples (couple identity, loyalty, integrity, self-reliance), but Connectedness to family, community provides support, resources which avoid isolation and make new connections.

**"...to be your loving and faithful wife..."**

(Her sister, sigh): "Yeah, I remember saying that five years ago, and we've done nothing but fight since. Back-and-forth, blowing up or walking out. What they don't know!"

#### CONFLICT RESOLUTION PARADOXES

Aversive cycles (negative exchanges) kill relationships; Cut off negatives and quit building-up toxic hostility, but... While stonewalling (withdrawing, refusing to argue) avoids conflict, it leaves feelings "gunnysacked" or unresolved. Couples need to use conflict constructively for their good.

**"...as long as we both shall live."**

(Both): "I hope so. (I hope he/she thought about this)."

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